

Regulating labour immigration: Enduring challenges and new questions

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Overview

- What are the goals? In whose interests ?
- Preferential access to the national/local labour market
- Measuring skills and shortages
- Responding to shortages: Is immigration the 'best' answer?
- Temporary or permanent: What rights for migrant workers?
- What is new? 'systemic resilience'; 'strategic approach'



What are the goals? In whose interests?

- Economic growth
- Distribution
- Social effects
- *[Resilience]*
- *Migrants*
- *Countries of origin*

→ Representation and governance?



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Preferential access to the national/local labour market

- Who and why?
- Tensions with employers
- How?
 - Resident labour markets tests
 - Shortage occupation lists
 - Labour market regulations
 - Quotas, Taxes
 - ...



Shortage occupation lists, e.g. UK

Occupation code	Job types included on the shortage occupations list	Areas of the UK where there is a shortage	Annual salary (80% of going rate)
1181	Health services and public health managers and directors – all jobs	England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland	80% of going rate: £30,720 (£15.15 per hour)
1242	Residential, day and domiciliary care managers and proprietors – all jobs	England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland	80% of going rate: £21,360 (£10.53 per hour)
2111	Chemical scientists – only jobs in the nuclear industry	Scotland only	80% of going rate: £21,360 (£10.53 per hour)
2112	Biological scientists and biochemists – all jobs	England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland	80% of going rate: £23,760 (£11.72 per hour)
2113	Physical scientists – only the following jobs in the construction-related ground engineering industry: engineering geologist	England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland	80% of going rate: £29,200 (£14.40 per hour)

SOURCE:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations>



The problem with ‘skills’ and ‘shortages’

Skills:

- Conceptually and empirically ambiguous
- Credentialised vs non-credentialised; experience; ‘hard/soft’
- Demand for employees with specific personal characteristics and ‘attitudes’ (good ‘work ethic’, ‘compliant’, ‘cooperative’)

Shortages:

- No universal definition; employers often demand more workers at prevailing wages
- “Why not let wages rise?”
- Some employers prefer migrant labour



Responding to ‘skills needs’ and ‘shortages’: Key role of system effects

In principle, alternative responses:

- Raise wages and/or improve working conditions to attract more domestic labour
- Reduce labour intensity of production processes e.g. automation
- Relocate production to countries with lower labour costs
- Redirect business toward less labour-intensive goods/services
- Employ more migrant workers

Employers don’t make these decisions in a ‘vacuum’:

- Key role of institutional framework and wider public policies



Temporary or permanent ? What rights for migrant workers?

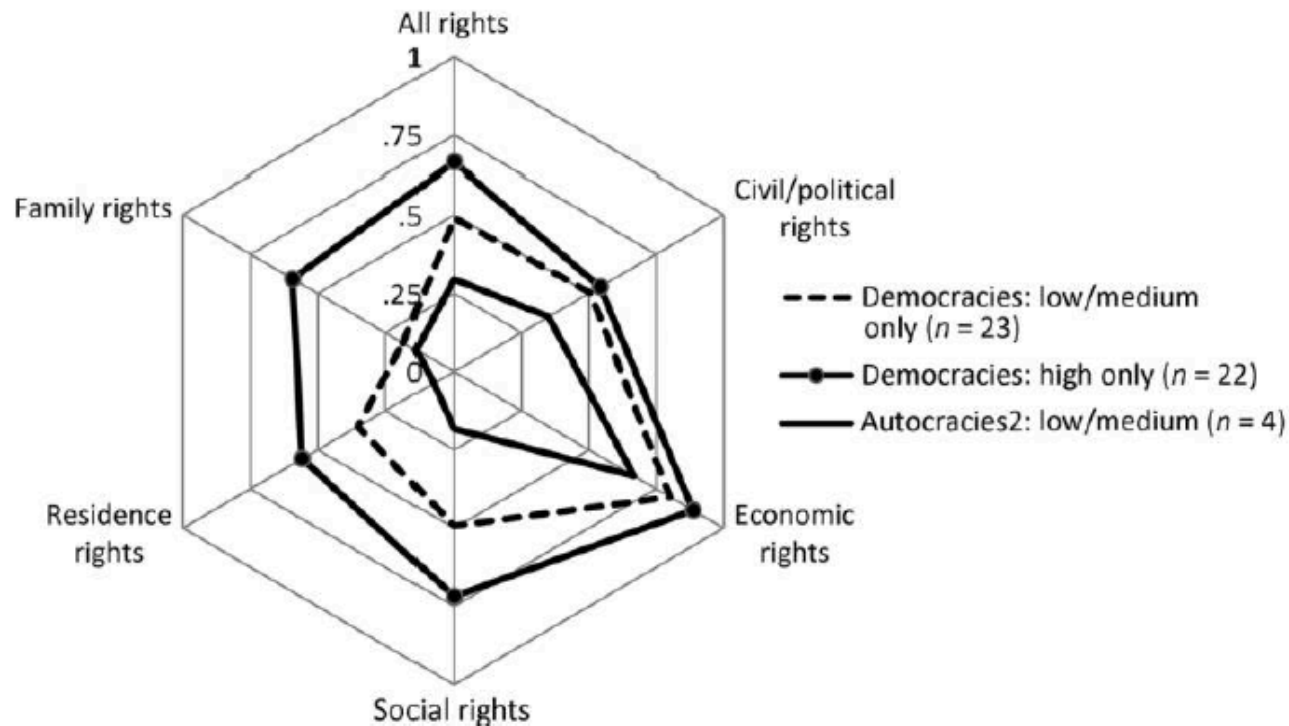


Figure 5. Restrictions of rights under temporary-migration programs by targeted skill level and variety of capitalism.

Source: Ruhs 2018

Key ethical dilemma
between global and
domestic justice (Bauboeck
and Ruhs 2022)

=> 'fair representation'

=> how to represent
migrants' interests?

Systemic resilience: Policy implications?

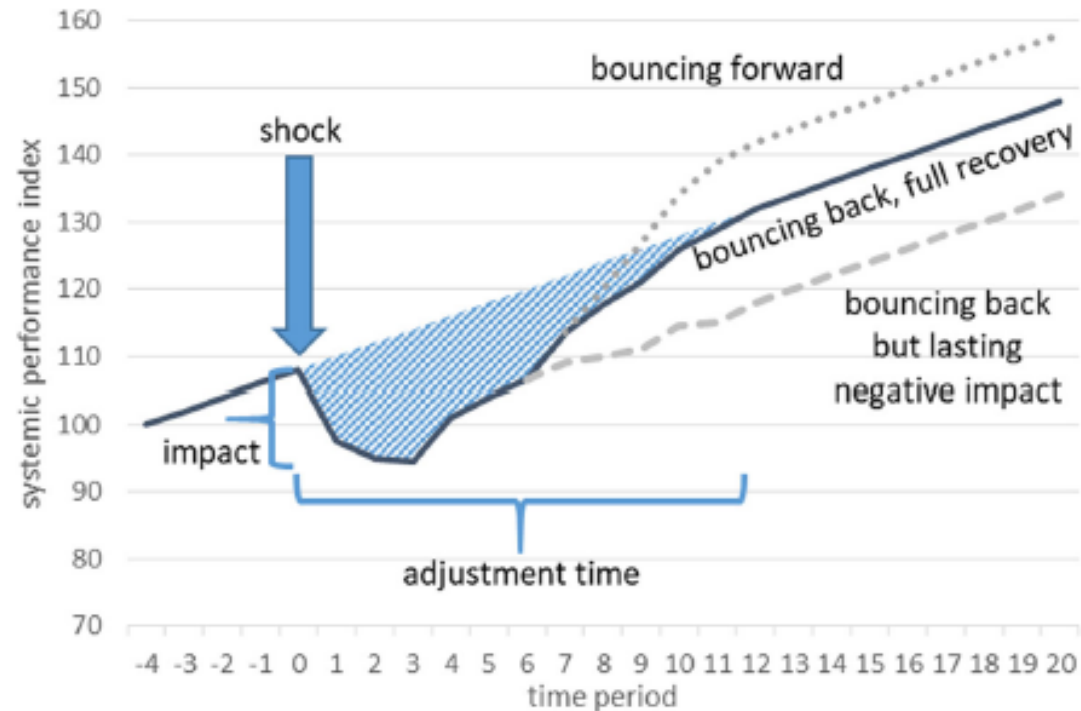


Fig. 1 Illustration of systemic resilience

- From national to trans-national systems
- From short-term to long-term
- From protecting the employment of citizens to protecting the resilience of essential services

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